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## ATG Interviews Howard Harris

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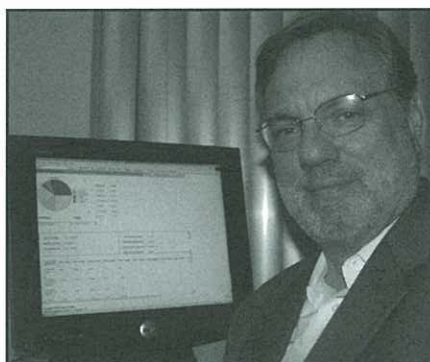
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## General Manager, Library Dynamics <hharris@librarydynamics.com>

by Robyn A Dudley, MLIS, BA Ed. (Librarian and Technology Consultant, Charleston, SC; Phone: 843-860 9644)  
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*"Visualization allows our clients to get a graphical overview of the library in relation to...other libraries, library groups, or authoritative bibliographic sources ... drilling down to the level of wanted detail — even to individual full MARC bibliographic records."*

— Howard Harris



### ATG: Who is Library Dynamics?

**HH:** Library Dynamics offers libraries innovative tools for analyzing, understanding, and making decisions about the development and management of library collections, resources, and capabilities. Library Dynamics, founded in 1998, initiated *Weedlist*. This program matched the shelflists of numerous small and large academic libraries to the titles from each of the three successive *Books for College Libraries*. Libraries have used this tool to identify titles dropped from *BCL* as prime candidates for weeding. Librarians requests for additional services have led Library Dynamics to bring to market a number of additional capabilities. In 2004 and 2005, Library Dynamics has expanded its services dramatically.

**ATG:** Howard, why and how did you get involved with Library Dynamics? Were you there in 1998 when it was founded?

**HH:** Robyn, your question lets me tell you a little about Library Dynamics and what led me to take on the role of General Manager of our company. Both of these comments should give you some insight into our company.

### Jane Burke Interview from page 44

**JB:** One of the reasons that I am working with *Serials Solutions* and *ProQuest* is for the opportunity to be in the library community at a time of unprecedented opportunity. This is a time of real opportunity, not just challenges. As we continue to see an avalanche of various pieces of digital content, the library's ability to organize and present it is more critical than ever. There aren't any physical shelves to browse, and you have to use the available technologies to make what you have available. 🌱

**Bill Buchanan**, a successful innovator and publisher in our industry, established **Library Dynamics** with **Bob Asleson** in 1998. Initially, the principle product of **Library Dynamics** was the development of *Weedlist*. *Weedlist* was based upon **Bill's** work with **Evan Farber**, former College Librarian at **Earlham College**. **Farber** proposed that academic librarians could base weeding and storage issues on titles that had been superseded in subsequent editions of *Books for College Libraries*. (**Farber** wrote an article about this for *Library Journal* which can be found in **Farber, E. I.** (1997)... *Library Journal*, 122(13), 44-45.

I knew **Bill** in the 1990's. He was a very interesting and creative guy, and he was successful in bringing **Evan Farber's** idea to fruition through *Weedlist* for quite a while. However, **Bill's** health began to fail in 1998, and any further development on *Weedlist* came to a stop. When **Bill** passed away in 2000, the library community lost a very creative and productive member.

After leaving the **University of Maryland College Park** in 2001 where I had been the Director for Information Technology, I returned to an active consulting practice with library clients. In late 2001 I began discussions with **Bob Asleson** and **Eric Calaluca**, principals of the then re-invigorated **Library Dynamics**; however, my real interest in the company developed at the **ACRL Conference** in April 2003 in Charlotte. At about the same time, I had a conversation with **Bob Kieft**, the College Librarian at **Haverford College**. Our conversation focused on the type of collection analysis work that the **Tri College Consortium** had in mind and the type of service that they felt that they and others in the library community needed.

At that point, I was hooked. I could see a real problem to be solved and my background and experience contributed to my belief that I knew how I could approach the problem. At that point I renewed my conversations with **Li-**

**brary Dynamics'** principals and was offered the position of General Manager. Work began on **Spectra CRC** in the Summer and Fall of 2003 and by **Midwinter 2004** in San Diego we were showing **Spectra CRC** for the first time.

**ATG:** Is *Paratext* your parent company? Who else is on the team at *Library Dynamics* and what strengths to they bring to the company?

**HH:** Although **Library Dynamics** briefly operated as a division of **Paratext**, it soon became a separate corporate entity. I don't think there is any way to overestimate the value that such working relationships bring to a company. The ability to benefit from a wide spectrum of insights and experience within our two organizations gives us the flexibility of a smaller company plus a number of advantages possessed by much larger companies.

In **Library Dynamics**, we have a highly talented team. **Bob Asleson** and **Eric Calaluca**, principals in **Paratext**, assist **Library Dynamics** with administrative matters and accounting. **Susan Severtson** leads our nationwide Marketing and Sales efforts. Three of us from across our organization who are librarians serve as a product development team to assess new and existing products and services, product requirements and specifications, requested changes to existing products and services, market opportunity, and product support.

We have four people that work with client **MARC** bibliographic and use data by analyzing and processing it into a resource for our clients. They also create and maintain an impressive online search and retrieval capability to host that bibliographic resource.

Separately, we have a team of three Systems, Application, and Internet Technology technical staff who develop and deliver the visualization technology that allows us to work with quantitative data in new and exciting ways. We also have a group that focuses on the hosting and management of the servers that provide our Internet accessible services.

**ATG:** I noticed on the company Website for *Library Dynamics*, that you produce *Spectra CRC* and *NATC (North American Title Count)*. Please tell us about your background and how your experience has enabled you to publish these tools for libraries.

**HH:** From the beginning of my career I have focused on technology, planning, management, and systems. Early in my career I had experience with approval plan book purchasing at **Argonne National Laboratory's Library** and also as a part of the Systems Department at the **University of Chicago Library** where we made use of the **MARC** tapes to create an alerting service for bibliographers based on language and subject profiles.

continued on page 47





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### Howard Harris Interview from page 46

Both at the **University of Chicago** and in my consulting work with libraries principally with **RMG Consultants, Inc.**, I learned how to work with a technologically oriented team each of whom had specialized skills. I learned how to write requirements and specifications and how to coordinate the development of technically oriented projects.

Later, as a consultant to the **American Library Association** and the **National Center for Educational Statistics**, I began to appreciate the value and efficiency of visualization tools that could analyze complete datasets, provide for repeated exploratory analysis of such data, and also convey insights directly to various audiences who may or may not have the time to review tabular presentations of data.

I think these are some of the elements of my background that have contributed to my understanding of how to go about creating and developing products and services for **Library Dynamics**.

**ATG:** *Your experience as a library automation consultant and also as a practitioner and strategist, gives you a unique perspective. What trends for collection development and collection management can we expect in the near future?*

**HH:** In some ways it feels so presumptuous to think that my experience could give me such insights but let me try to share some of my thinking. Libraries have in place a number of substantial investments in physical plants, content, systems, and most importantly human resources and the challenge is to rationalize those invest-

ments and protect them. I think we are seeing a lot of change. At the front end of the process, I think we may see changes in buying patterns as selectors engage in some increased spot buying of materials in some areas based on need, not just anticipated need. I think the notion of “in print” is under challenge given the emergence of evergreen electronic content. Even in the print sphere there has been some recent research which challenges the notion that older, “out of print” material is scarce and pricy and that will have its effects.

I believe there has been great interest in various digitization projects with somewhat more modest understandings of how to take such projects into account at a working level in libraries. This falls in the area that we in **Library Dynamics** refer to as the “capabilities” area — what a library may not own or license but can deliver.

I think that the evolution of very specialized systems and procedures for the purchasing, management, and reporting with regard to electronic resources has left libraries vulnerable in terms of accountability for their resources overall. This is part of what prompts us to provide views of the library which integrate rather than segment such investments.

I feel those who support private higher education, as well as those in the public sector, have interests in fostering institutional strength, accountability, as well as new expectations for the benefits that collaboration including collaboration between and among libraries can bring.

**ATG:** *I hear the word Data Mining used in a variety of ways. Would you explain your definition and how the tools produced by Library Dynamics assist librarians with their collection analysis? Is there a certain segment*

*of the library market that can benefit best from your products?*

**HH:** I agree with you about the term Data Mining. There is a movie titled “The Spanish Prisoner” in which there is some business process or formula that is supposed to make the company and its principals a fortune. Data mining always seems a bit like that to me as if gold could be extracted from information. To me very simply Data Mining consists in the after the fact observation of patterns and/or relationships within data that people create and maintain for some other more prosaic business or operational purpose. Someone could characterize what we do in that way and I wouldn’t disagree but I don’t choose to talk about it in that way.

What we do is allow librarians to visualize the patterns and relationships in their data that may have gone unnoticed and to use the patterns and relationships that they discover to give them an overview of the library as a whole in relationship to a consortia to which they belong, another library, a set of libraries, and/or one or more recognized bibliographic sources including authoritative bibliographies or review sources. Our services allow librarians to examine those relationships within progressively more detailed subject areas, and ultimately to examine individual titles, their ownership, and standing within recognized bibliographies and review media. These capabilities support a wide range of library operational needs.

I think that increasingly librarians are becoming aware of visualization techniques but it will take the community a while to learn and adopt such technologies. There are some efforts in our community that are beginning to

*continued on page 50*



highlight the importance of visually based quantitative information including LibQUAL+™ in the ARL arena and other such information that focuses on libraries' use to solicit, track, understand, and act upon users' perceptions of service quality. In addition, visually based quantitative tools based on GIS and demographic data within the public library sector have begun to play an important role in communicating the tangible value of library programs in the overall health of communities. I believe we will see a growing use of such tools across the board.

**ATG:** *Many libraries are forming multitype consortia. Do you have a model of how consortia libraries are able to use Library Dynamics' products and services?*

**HH:** It's interesting that you mention consortia. I was showing an earlier version of **Spectra CRC** to a librarian who has written in the collection development area. Two comments from that meeting have stayed with me. This librarian made the observation that although **Spectra CRC** was initially developed for college and university libraries, research libraries share some of the same needs and could make use of capabilities similar to those we have developed. It was clear in our meeting that **Spectra CRC** not only makes the case for collaboration, but also provides the tools to guide and evaluate it. I found this interesting in light of the comment I read in an introductory text on collection development. The comment said that the effect that cooperative collection development has, is probably the most written about topic in the collection development field but that putting cooperative collection development into practice programmatically is inherently difficult and unrealized on a scale comparable to its importance. My belief is that the lack of appropriate tools contributes a good deal to that difficulty. Interestingly, I don't need to make the case to anyone in a consortium who sees **Spectra CRC**. It's not only a tool that demonstrates the value of a consortia but also allows those involved in a consortia to coordinate and evaluate the effectiveness of their cooperation and demonstrate it to their respective institutional management.

**ATG:** *You have decided to discontinue the print version of NATC which was formerly produced by the ALA Division ALCTS. Is this because you feel that the digital age has finally reached all libraries that could benefit from NATC?*

**HH:** The North American Title Count (NATC) has for many years compiled counts of the number of titles held by libraries in approximately 700 subject categories. It grew out of what was then called the **National Shelflist Count**. It took a new name in time to reflect the participation of libraries in Canada in the Count. In the past the Count was undertaken every four years.

Actually ALCTS discontinued the print version of NATC when they were responsible for the program in favor of a CD-ROM based product. I think we are just taking the next logical

step in moving the content from the CD-ROM environment to accessibility via the Web as well as the additional step of making it an annual undertaking which we think will help libraries who depend on it when they undertake collection development studies.

**ATG:** *Who are your competitors? Why are LD's tools superior?*

**HH:** Companies have come and gone in this market space. And of course it depends on how you characterize the market. There are some large companies and organizations offering various tools for collection analysis including **OCLC** and **Bowker**. Other organizations have focused on one or the other component of the collection analysis business, especially for serials or electronic resources. I think each of us sees the market differently and I am not sure there is enough cohesion in the marketplace to call us competitors.

What we in **Library Dynamics** believe to be distinctive in our approach is our belief that clients value the ability to visualize graphically key quantitative aspects of the library's content. These aspects include its overall size, its subject matter, its comparability — in terms of distinctiveness, areas of overlap, and gaps, and its usage. We believe that the ability to view a number of different analyses in spatial terms focused on the overall library or a library segment of interest enhances the pace, the quality, and the transparency of decision-making and communication within the library and between the library and its sources of support.

Visualization allows our clients to get a graphical overview of their library in relation to one or more other libraries, library groups, or authoritative bibliographic sources. The user can interact directly with the plotted data, highlighting data points which reveal information about the plotted point and drilling down from an overall library level to the level of wanted detail — even to individual full **MARC** bibliographic records. Currently we provide eleven (11) analyses at each of three progressively detailed subject levels: Class, SubClass, and Interval. Plots at each of the 22 Classes, 250 SubClasses, and 6,000 Intervals provide more than 60,000 potential plots. Intelligent navigation among the levels and the plots guide the user to only those areas of greatest interest but does not limit the specialist who wants to work at a very precise level of detail. All of this power is further enhanced when you consider the number of comparisons available to other libraries, library groups, and bibliographic sources.

In visualizing usage we begin with circulation and in house usage data supplied by our library clients. However, we combine the various types of usage, normalize it, and analyze the data in several ways. Because we extract and make use of the date that the library acquired each title we calculate in each case its annualized use and report that in the bibliographic record. Based on that calculation we provide two types of plots of such data — one that emphasizes the aggregate use of material within subject categories and another, the average intensity of use of titles within subject areas. Usage is not just a column in a table for us. We intend to develop additional tools and ways

of seeing and gaining access to data that improves the library abilities for understanding both the collections, resources and capabilities of the individual library and library consortia.

Fundamentally, we are focused on delivering tools, products, and services focused on analyzing, understanding, decision making, and interpreting library physical **COLLECTIONS** — (i.e., what the library owns — the "C" in the product name), electronic **RESOURCES** — (i.e., what the library either owns or licenses in electronic form — "R") and **CAPABILITIES** — (i.e., the other "C" — what the library neither owns nor licenses but can invoke and deliver to meet the library user's need from consortia and shared system library partners or other sources.)

We also believe in leveraging human and financial investments that libraries and library groups have made in purchasing and maintaining integrated library systems and the content of those systems with respect to library materials and their use. I think the financial and human investments in those systems need to be leveraged and not abandoned in favor of some other approach to analyzing the library's collection, resources, and capabilities.

**ATG:** *I understand that you plan to participate in the 2005 Charleston Conference? Why do you feel it is important for Library Dynamics to be at this Conference?*

**HH:** The Charleston Conference gives us a unique ability to meet with those with interests and responsibilities in the development, analysis, and management of library collections. Actually, "meet" is an overworked word. It is an opportunity to hear and participate in great programs, to sit down with people and have a conversation about what matters to them in collection development, and to do it at a time early in the academic year — prior to **ALA Midwinter** — a time of year that allows academic librarians to participate. **Charleston** is large enough to have the facilities to host the conference but small enough that the logistics of getting to and from meetings and hotels do not absorb a disproportionate amount of people's energy and time. And then of course, there is **Charleston**, a city rich with history and culture.

**ATG:** *According to the company description on your Website, Library Dynamics will be introducing new products and services in the near future. Would you give the ATG readers a glimpse of what's coming up in 2006?*

**HH:** We just recently brought **Spectra CRC** to the Web. We are very pleased with how librarians are interacting directly with the plots of data which results in displays of plot detail based on responses from the visualization engine at the server and clicking on points for information in order to drive the analysis into more specific subject areas.

For the present, we will be concentrating by and large on ways of enhancing our existing products and services such as **Spectra CRC** and **NATC**. Whether some of those developments become part of the core products and services or emerge on their own remain to be seen. Also, our experience in working with data which we receive from libraries has led us to believe that

*continued on page 52*



# From the Reference Desk

by **Tom Gilson** (Head, Reference Services, Addlestone Library, College of Charleston, 66 George Street, Charleston, SC 29401; Phone: 843-953-8014; Fax: 843-953-8019) <gilson@cofc.edu>

Libraries wanting to develop their collections in African American studies have had a few recent titles to ponder. The just released *Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature* (2005, 0313329753, \$495) may be on the short list for many. Edited by **Hans Ostrom** and **J. David Macy, Jr.**, these five compact volumes are packed with close to 1030 articles written by some 200 scholars.

It comes as no surprise that coverage includes numerous articles on influential writers, as well as those on various literary forms, genres, and movements. However, there is also ample space given to the historical and social issues impacting African American literature ranging from Afro-centricity to the Vietnam War, affirmative action to the Middle Passage and from the Nation of Islam to the Underground Railroad. Other essays treat important newspapers like the *Amsterdam News* and literary journals like *Callaloo* while others cover influential regions and locations ranging from New Orleans to Detroit and from Haiti to Paris. While accessible to general readers and high school students, undergraduates will find the articles useful for background and facts, and will appreciate the list of added sources following each article.

The set also contains an alphabetical

cal, as well as topical list of all articles, a helpful introduction and a chronology. These features all add value and give the reader a firmer sense of the contents and coverage of the *Encyclopedia*. Providing access to the page level is a thorough, easy to use general index.

Rich and detailed, the scope of this work is nonetheless broad and inclusive. The *Greenwood Encyclopedia of African American Literature* not only provides information about writers and literary movements but it successfully places them in historic and societal context. While it in no way replaces *Macmillan's Encyclopedia of African American History and Culture* (a 2nd edition will be released later this year), it is a worthy complement. It also serves to update, as well as broaden the scope of the critically praised *Oxford Companion to African American Literature* (1997, 0195065107).

Other recent reference works that will also find a place in African American studies collections include *Oxford's* second edition of *Africana: the Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience* (2005, 0195223276, \$620) edited by renown scholars **Kwame Anthony Appiah** and **Henry Louis Gates Jr.** and *Routledge's Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* (2005, 157958389X, \$325) edited by **Cary D. Wintz** and **Paul Finkelman**.

*Routledge's Encyclopedia of Christian Theology* (2005, 1579582508, \$495) offers a serious, scholarly treatment with a decidedly European slant. The reason for that is obvious. It is an English language translation of a 2nd edition of the *Dictionnaire critique de theologie*, first published in 1998. Edited by **Jean-Yves Lacoste**, the over 500 articles contained in this three-volume set attempt to lend shape to the "massive amount

of discourse and doctrines that Christianity has assembled about **God** and its experience of **God.**" **Lacoste** draws on the expertise of 250 scholars, the majority coming from Continental Europe, to accomplish this challenging endeavor.

While there are discussions about liturgy, church administration, spiritual practices and social and moral issues, the main concerns here are theological concepts like the Trinity, Christology, Knowledge of **God**, Justification, Salvation and Revelation. Many of the articles are more than a background recitation of facts and historical development. The contributors are not afraid to point to controversy, speculate and provoke questions and may make some readers steeped in tradition pause. The production features are what you would expect from a work of this caliber. The organization is alphabetical with liberal use of cross references, and while there are no illustrations, the layout of the text is clear and visually engaging. The bibliographies are often extensive but many references are to works in languages other than English, a possible limitation for many students.

Intended for the scholar and upper division or graduate student, this reference will not be easy going for the general lay reader. Treating complex concepts and in the critical tradition of European, especially French theological thought, many of the articles ask more than a casual familiarity with the issues covered. All by the largest public libraries will probably pass on this work; however, theological libraries, as well as academic libraries supporting majors in religious studies should give it serious consideration.

**ABC-CLIO** has published another nicely focused historical encyclopedia suitable for either circulation or reference collections. *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of America's Founding* (2005, 1851096698, \$185) includes more than 400 articles providing a multidimensional look at this central event in American history. Individual essays cover the delegates and other influential people, important committees, relevant documents, proposed plans of government, and philosophical influences. Author **John R. Vile** writes in an accessible, straightforward fashion informed by serious scholarship referencing authoritative sources throughout most of these essays. A series of appendices provide relevant historic documents prior to, during and after the convention, a selected bibliography, and a brief list of authoritative Websites. There is also a topical table of contents, a day by day timetable of the convention and an introductory essay setting the stage for the rest of the articles.

Academic libraries in particular will find this title useful. As noted above, given its special-

continued on page 54



## Howard Harris Interview from page 50

there are some ways in which we may be able to enhance their abilities to manage and improve the quality of that data. Stay tuned.

**ATG:** Is there anything else that you would like to tell the *ATG* readers about yourself, your family, and/or your company? What is your greatest professional accomplishment?

**HH:** I am glad to say I have worked in the library field for a number of years. I attended library school "a few years ago" in North Carolina at **UNC-Chapel Hill** where I met my wife in the Master's program. **Pat**, my wife, is perhaps better known in the library field than I am having worked for the **American Library Association** and **NISO** in the course of her career.

We have one daughter, **Mary** who is a Producer for **ABC News**. Just before beginning our interview I watched the first of four stories in a series she produced entitled "Made in China" for **Good Morning America**. I hope my greatest professional accomplishment always lies ahead of me instead of behind me. I find you can drive better looking through the windshield than in the rear view mirror.

**ATG:** Thank you very much, Howard. See you at the Charleston Conference!

**HH:** I'll be looking to see you there **Robyn**. **Library Dynamics** will be at the **Charleston Advisor Vendor Showcase** event on the first day and available then and later in the meeting to talk with participants to learn about their needs and obviously to talk with people interested in our products and services. I wish everyone a good meeting in Charleston. 